

Yalobusha Review

Volume 1 *Spring 1995*

Article 3

April 2021

Dream Diary

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Recommended Citation

Pitts, J. E. (2021) "Dream Diary," *Yalobusha Review*. Vol. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol1/iss1/3>

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Dream Diary

Winner: 1995 Evans Harrington Creative Writing Scholarship

So many of them seem real,
and so many coming on of late
that have to do with my neck.
A broken neck in one,
and knowing my neck is about to be broken by some
hazy attackers and not being able to stop the specters
who are holding my head like a melon in their hands.
I know it's about to snap and I say so aloud,
I'm telling you it's about to break, I say,
but they keep on turning it too far right.
I can hear it and I can feel it
but instead of dying I wake up in a fit of lockjaw
and slap the alarm clock across the room,
the power cord tearing out of the wall
and whipping over my head like a snake dropping from a tree.
And would-be hangings keep occurring.
Always on the run from
a building where people are in deep lines going to gallows.
There are some ovens involved also but I won't delve into those
things. It's the hangings that I recall.
My last request is water
so I inch out to get a drink
from a fountain that I know sits down the dirt road outside
and I'm running suddenly like a gazelle in the mud
through my old hometown, going through the
backyards of the big houses I never lived in
where my old classmates are having pool parties.
Iron gates surround their pools and they splash around,
their letter jackets in heaps.
They wouldn't see me if I were a dinosaur crashing over
Their shrubs. I can't say a word in my dreams anyway.
But I can think, and I can reason, and I know I'm on the lam.
It's January and somehow the police are involved
and I'm hot from all this running

and I take off my coat and ditch it
because it slows me down. It's moving day
and I stop at a house to help some folks move.
That was years ago, they moved away years ago,
I think in my dream,
and I get back on the road.
The house isn't even there when I look back.
But I'm looking for a house to hide out in
and each one I find is locked
or was built during the Civil War
and is rumored ghost-filled
with names like Longstreety or Beauraguardy
carved in ornate script on a marker outside
and this whole thing is getting much too out of hand.
In panic I start doing the butterfly in mid-air
and it works—I'm leaping high off the ground,
swimming through my old hometown parting the air
and then the air rushes behind me to fill up the space
and I bolt ahead of the police
and the car of the local newspaper
who only want to know my version,
who want the boy who was going to be hung but now
can swim in mid-air with no water.
Soon I'm at the little diner with my aunt and uncle
who buy me dinner for a graduation present
but can't buy me a car and won't buy me a motorcycle
else I might end up maimed and dumb for life and an argument
ensues and they don't deserve it but they get it anyway.
Every time I go to rest I go to flight
and each time I wake I can't believe
I'm still alive,
for a psychologist could not cure me and a pastor cannot save
me from a sleep that turns me dead.
My double life moves on each night,
a running corpse thrashing
in this haunted bed.